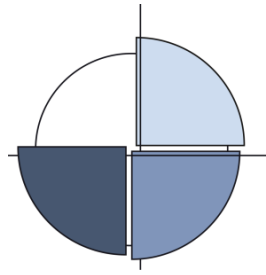


# Repräsentationen sozialer Ordnungen im Wandel

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*Melanie Krebs und Madlen Pilz*

## Anthropological Urban Transect

A Methodology to Study Urban Environment



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## Abstract

### Anthropological Urban Transect: A Methodology to Study Urban Environment

This paper presents the application of a methodological approach originally developed for urban planning to urban anthropology. This research approach focuses on different materialities in order to analyze functional zones, special areas and several categories of markers of up- and downgrading processes within a city. This focus on materialities and their integration patterns into urban space enables to make systematic comparisons between different areas within a city as well as between different cities. Using examples of transects carried out in two Southern Caucasian capitals – Baku (Azerbaijan) and Tbilisi (Georgia) – different ways of implementing a transect, collecting and recording the data are discussed.

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# Anthropological Urban Transect: A Methodology to Study Urban Environment

## Introduction

The anthropological project “Identity Politics in the South Caucasus: National Representation, Post-socialist Society and Urban Public Space” conducted research in the South Caucasian capitals Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan between 2008 and 2013. The project focused on gathering and comparing the post-socialist changes in the symbolic, material and social urban landscapes of the region. Furthermore, it explored the question of how to define the dynamics and elements of these changes and how to analyze the local, regional and global influences – for example, how the national and the socialist pasts, and the democratic-liberalist and neoliberal strategies shape urban spaces and new societies.

In order to explore everyday life and the shape of a city, urban anthropologists use different methodological tools including participant observation and so-called *Wahrnehmungsspaziergänge*, go-alongs or urbanographies as instruments of an “anthropology in the city”. Interviews, talks and different ways of mappings are common to collect the perceptions and uses of urban places and areas for analyzing individual and collective views of the city. But the question of how to capture systematically the material, symbolic and social order of the cities as a whole still remains a problem. Therefore the application of the transect, a methodology originally used in the natural sciences, specified and implemented for urban planning, seems to be a promising tool for urban anthropology. The aim of this method is to gather the different layers systematically and to connect the perspectives of an “anthropology of the city” and “in the city” as well as to design a tool to compare the findings on different cities.

In this paper we propose a way to apply the transect in anthropological urban studies. We describe ways to carry out a transect based on our experiences in the South Caucasian capitals. We discuss different features of the transect and present categories implemented into the transect as tools for researching urban changes.



## From Biology to Urban Studies

Transects are traditional forms of regional surveys in, for example, biology and geography.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, they have also been applied in developmental community studies<sup>2</sup> and urban planning. As a research instrument, transects are generally used for identifying the quantity and quality of the distribution of certain populations or materials in a specific area. In practice, it suggests following a randomly chosen sideways path through a defined area to count the territorial occurrence of certain species. The results indicate the spatial distribution of these species and of their land use practices. In this manner, transects show general patterns of everyday uses of space.

In the 1990s, a group of city planners and architects – the New Urban Planners<sup>3</sup> around Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberg who proposed the idea of a New Urbanism in cities in the United States – adopted the transect as a tool to improve urban planning. They started to use this method in order to visualize the ideal structure of a city and the distribution of infrastructure required by its residents. Their model transects were developed to help urban planners avoid urban sprawl and develop cities in which each district offers equal facilities for shopping, health care, education, leisure and neighborhood activities.<sup>4</sup> The New Urbanists identified six different zones from the rural to the city core zone (illustration 1) in the common US-city, which are distinguished by functional features. They defined a list of formal markers for each zone including density, functional mix, the design of buildings and places in public and in private ownership. Furthermore, they focused on the specific, small-scale elements of the material and design that are characteristic for each zone.

According to Plater-Zyberg's and Duany's findings, rural and suburban zones are characterized by a lower building density than central and core urban zones. In these inner city zones, free space – that is, areas not used for construction – is becoming more and more limited and rents for living and businesses are increasing. Each urban zone has its own typical street furniture and respective patterns of distribution – for example, lampposts with a more sophisticated design and made of better materials are more frequently distributed in the city center than in the suburbs and rural zones. In an exemplary study in Williamsburg, Virginia, Bohl and Plater-Zyberg demonstrated how it is possible to characterize different urban zones by different types of fences: from rough wooden structures, which are not designed to impress but to keep strangers away in the rural zone, and neatly painted fences in the suburban zones, which also represent the landlord's care of his property, to the ostentatious fences in the city center, which symbolize both borders and the importance of the space behind.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Compare: D. Matless, "Regional Surveys and Local Knowledges", in: *Transactions of British Geographers*, 17 (1992), pp. 464–480, in particular p. 469.

2 Community researchers used this methodology especially to find out more about water and soil use and sanitary conditions in a community. They extended the concept by encouraging locals to accompany the researcher through the transect and share their knowledge.

3 We also use the shorter terms New Urbanists or the abbreviation NUP to refer to the New Urban Planners.

4 Andres Duany/Emily Talen, "Transect Planning" in: *Journal of the American Planning Association* 68, 3, (2002) pp. 245–166.

5 Charles Bohl/Elisabeth Plater-Zyberg, "Building Community across the Rural-to-Urban Transect in: *Places* 18(1) (2006), pp. 4–17.



*Illustration 1: Physical Characteristics of the Transect,*  
[http://www.transect.org/rural\\_img.html](http://www.transect.org/rural_img.html)

In sum, the transect developed by the New Urbanists is a tool that captures structural, everyday, and social aspects of the different urban zones. These vary from zone to zone while internal variations within each zone are often neglected. As a result of their concentration on zone-specific materialities, zones are generally described as homogeneous parts of the city.

The art historian Dino Marcantino has criticized this point and the New Urbanists' limited consideration of horizontal materialities.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, he developed the "Iconographic Transect"<sup>7</sup>, putting architecture and façades, in particular, in the center of analysis. In so doing, he tried to create a tool for identifying and describing the internal structures of different zones. His idea is based on the assumption that in each zone buildings range from being "rustic", and "vernacular", "low classical" and "high classical" to "monumental". A "monumental" structure marks important buildings in each zone – like a small mausoleum or sanctuary in the rural zone, the town hall or main cathedral in the city center. The appearance of street furniture, for example, and the ornaments that can make a building "vernacular" or "monumental", are restricted to particular zones. As he points out, ornaments that mark a building as "monumental" differ in each zone. Ornaments that are transferred, for example, from the core to the suburban zone are perceived as something that does not "fit in" or as "kitsch".<sup>8</sup>

The urban planner Jaime Correa criticizes another point. He accentuates that urban transects focus too much on a "model city" or a typical middle-sized US city planned right from its foundation. For that reason, he criticizes the approach as not suitable for complex cities shaped by history, culture, climate, and topography. Correa argues that most cities are far too complex to be reduced to the strict pattern of an urban-to rural-transect.<sup>9</sup> He emphasizes the ethnocentric character of the transect, which makes it complicated to apply it to, for example, traditional Muslim or European medieval cities.

For anthropological purposes, both critiques enrich the data which can be gathered by a transect since in anthropology, the question of a city's design and development is always seen as culturally, historically, economically and politically path-dependent. For research purposes, the zoning model and the New Urbanists' descriptive features are not seen as a normative matrix, but as culturally and geographically-based expressions of a variety of elements that produce urban environment and construct urban space. The anthropological value of the technical, construction and design elements identified by the New Urbanists is threefold:

1. Seeing the transect as a way to gather and arrange data offers a good matrix for interregional and intercultural comparisons.
2. Seeing the transect data as visual and material evidence offers insights into wider political and economic influences.
3. The focus of the transect on small-scale elements enables the researcher to preserve types of collective and individual, formal and informal appropriations.

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6 In their typical transects, the New Urbanists reduced buildings to their ground views, that is, to occupied space and functional features.

7 Dino Marcantonio, "Iconography and the Transect", <http://www.planetizen.com/node/89> 2003.

8 Marcantino "Iconography" and Bohl "Building Community", pp. 6, also made this observation in their study on fences.

9 Jaime Correa, "Counterpoint: Transect Transgressions", in *Places* 18(1) (2006), pp. 24–25.



## Transferring Transects to Urban Anthropology

The idea of walking through a city while concentrating on small material details and the appearance and behavior of its residents has different forerunners. In the literary world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is connected with the figure of the flâneur in the European capitals of Paris and Berlin and especially with the name of Walter Benjamin. The flâneur is both an urban native and a detached observer who is able to recognize the slightest change.<sup>10</sup>

Transects introduce a special technique into investigative walks as a type of urban research, distinct from go-alongs<sup>11</sup> and other forms such as narrative urbanism, or city telling<sup>12</sup> and Big Urban Walks<sup>13</sup>. In Margarethe Kusenbach's go-alongs and Elke Krasny's city telling, locals lead the researcher through their everyday lives sharing their explanations, memories and spontaneous thoughts about urban space. Kusenbach distinguishes between the "natural go-along", where the researcher accompanies the informant on her or his everyday routes, and the "contrived" or "experimental go-alongs", which implies walking and talking with the informant outside his familiar areas.<sup>14</sup> With regard to the way in which the route is determined, a transect is comparable to the experimental go-along. But in contrast to a "go-along" or "city telling", the focus of a transect is not primarily on local perceptions and constructions of urban space. The central point is to observe the structure and everyday life of the city and to compare the different urban layers within the city. In other words, it is a way to classify typical and non-typical interrelations between the general structure of a city and certain places. It makes it possible to recognize the interplay between different levels like 1<sup>st</sup> the global, the local, and the regional, 2<sup>nd</sup> the past and the contemporary 3<sup>rd</sup> the collective and the individual. The main objective is to find out how these social interactions are inscribed on the material surface of the different parts of the city. Individual local perceptions and interpretations can also be included. In this manner, a transect creates the prerequisites for comparative work within and between different cities, paying particular attention to the range of forms of material culture that shape the city.

## Transect – Baku and Tbilisi

In both cities, we decided to use a transect that covered both prestigious and non-prestigious parts of the city, that is sites of everyday life and sites that are excluded from it. In this manner, it was possible to get to know the characteristic changes in the structure and texture of the cities.

Azerbaijan gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Its new wealth

10 Rob Shields, *Fancy Footwork*. Walter Benjamin's notes on *flânerie*. In: Keith Tester (ed.) *The flâneur*. (London/New York: Routledge 1994) pp. 61–80.

11 Margarethe Kusenbach, "Street Phenomenology: The Go-Along as Ethnographic Research Tool", in *Ethnography* (2003) 4(3) pp. 455–485.

12 Elke Krasny, "Narrativer Urbanismus oder die Kunst des City-Telling" in: *Urbanographies* ed. by Elke Krasny, Irene Nierhaus. (Berlin: Reimer 2008), pp. 29–44.

13 Martin Kohler, <http://www.pps.org/blog/between-walking-and-wandering-power-in-presence/>, last access 22.11.2013. Big Urban walks follow the same plan as transects, but the data recording is exclusively visual.

14 Kusenbach "Go-alongs" pp. 463–464.

is based on the oil and gas mining industries around the capital city of Baku. Baku is geographically shaped by the long coastline along the Caspian Sea and the surrounding hills, which gave the city the shape of an amphitheater – or at least gave it, before the skyscraper in the center started to be higher than the hills in the last few years.

In 1806, when the Russian Army seized Baku, the city was a small port on the Caspian Sea. The walled old town dates back to this period. That oil, found around Baku since medieval times, became the world's most important resource in the late 19th century accounts for the biggest transformation of the city. Around 1900 Baku was one of the richest cities in the world, a splendor that manifests itself in Art Nouveau buildings around (and also within) the old town, and in the industrial outskirts near the harbor, the so-called "Black City". As the capital of the Azerbaijani SSR between 1936 and 1991 and a major industrial and port city, Baku grew during Soviet times and the typical apartment blocks of this period can be found in the city center and in the microrayons surrounding the city. Most of the Soviet monuments have been destroyed and replaced with grand parks or new national memorials. The second oil boom started in the late 1990s and led to a new construction boom, with post-modern glass-and-concrete skyscrapers rapidly changing the city. While a small number of the Art Nouveau buildings around the central Fountain Square were carefully renovated, most quarters of the city that date back to the first oil boom were destroyed to make room for parks and skyscrapers.

Since 1991, Tbilisi has been the capital of independent Georgia. Since then it has seen a succession of governments, which were all overturned by revolutions, different civil wars in the 1990s in Tbilisi, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, and a military intervention by Russia in 2008.

In 1801, Tbilisi became the capital of the Russian province Georgia and the headquarters of the Russian governor in the South Caucasus in 1822. This meant big changes for the city on both a symbolic and a material level. Tbilisi acquired the status of a dependent and peripheral capital. A Russian or European district, in which monumental and almost classical styles dominated (though Art Nouveau and, to a degree, Orientalized classicism also appeared), was added to the so-called multiethnic and multireligious medieval town. Institutions perceived as part of a European high culture were opened, and industrialization developed following European patterns. The oriental-like market square became the cultural center of the Caucasus. After a short period of independence (1917–1921), Tbilisi first became the capital of the Transcaucasian Soviet Republic and later of the Georgian Socialist Soviet Republic (1921–1991). The city experienced a second wave of changes, which can be interpreted as modernization or as the partial demolition of the old building fabric since the changes (according to the socialist idea) aimed to bring more open space, air and light into the city. Once again the city was enlarged in order to accommodate all the rural migrants who came to work in the growing number of

companies owned by the socialist state: from the 1930s, buildings were added in the typical Stalin Empire Style and from the 1950s, in the shape of prefabricated high-rise apartment blocks. Since the Rose Revolution in 2003, the city has experienced a new phase of modernization. Monumental, postmodern glass buildings represent the current changes.

The transect through Baku followed one of the most important streets, the Nizami Kücesi. The Nizami Street is nearly 3 km long and leads from the city center to the industrial outskirts near the harbor, always parallel to the Caspian Sea. The oldest buildings along the street date back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and are located in the city center, next to the recently-built skyscrapers. On the way to the industrial zones, the researcher walks past Soviet residential buildings, both converted and operating factories and, eventually, the railway line. So it is an example of a transect that covers different Bakuvian urban zones, prestigious central parts, zones of everyday life and intermediary and peripheral areas– at least at the time when the transect was carried out in 2010/2011. In a quickly changing city like Baku, transects are necessarily but a snapshot of the time when they were done. The transect concentrated on commonly ignored elements of material culture along the street, such as street signs, house numbers, and memorial plates.

Street signs, for example, change from zone to zone: while the street signs in the city core zone and center are made from the same sandstone as the 19th-century houses and thus give the impression that they date back to the first oil boom, they were put there in 2010. For someone with knowledge of this period the fake is easy to spot: The signs use Latin letters, not the Arabic or Cyrillic alphabet which was used around 1900. In the suburban zone, the signs also display the now official Latin letters but are made of cheap metal. Some signs have survived from Soviet times when street names were written in both alphabets: Cyrillic and Latin. The number of these signs increases in the next zone where factories dominate near the railway line. The number of street signs in general is quite small in this zone, and the ones that are still there are rusty and hardly readable. Foreigners hardly ever come to this part of the city and there is no need for information or show-off here.

In Tbilisi, the transect was carried out from the center to the southern periphery alongside the river. Because of Tbilisi's linear structure, the city is very narrow in some parts. Thus it was difficult from time to time to follow a straight line on sidewalks, and for that reason, main roads were also included. The transect focused on national, socialist and global influences on the urban materiality; on the merging between public and private, and on individual and public use of urban space, especially economic use.

In both Tbilisi and Baku, it is possible to find the different functional zones identified by the New Urbanists. It is particularly striking that the succession of the zones changes partly in accordance with geographical features. Tbilisi, for example, is situated between mountains.



*Tbilisi (partial outline of the transect)**New Suburban area*

Situated on the Mtatsminda plateau, a mountain providing the territory of Tbilisi with natural borders

Typical features: one-family cottages, gated zones. Recreational area: green hills. Landmarks: amusement park (renovated socialist amusement park), Pantheon of Writers and Public Figures.

*Urban Core Zone*

Typical features: historic center – churches and historical residential buildings. Residential area, representative buildings – parliament, ministries, embassies; public buildings, institutions of high culture, bars and restaurants, schools, libraries, tourist area. Informal zoning: “Leselidze” Leselidze Street is a residential and shopping area in the old town that represents the city’s medieval past; “Bambis rigi” Bambis lane is an amusement and tourist area; “Kolkhos Square/market” large, former market for agrarian products and still used as a market square. Problem: major reconstruction activities, demolition of old buildings and new constructions followed by gentrification: arrival of international organizations and heavy population exchange and maximum deterioration of old buildings.

*Central Area Zone*

“Avlabari” is a neighborhood that since 2004 has experienced drastic change. Former features: a residential zone with no prestigious and nearly no public buildings, old one-family homes in bad condition, still based on the village structure it had when it was incorporated into Tbilisi at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Former landmarks: The Armenian Pantheon, Park of Friendship. New features: new architectural monuments – national cathedral, presidential palace, new urban park Rike, refurbished old houses, newly built cottages, new tourist and religious infrastructure – hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops. Informal zoning: Market, situated near the traffic junction “Metro” and the road to the airport.

*Residential Area*

Typical features: socialist part of the city, territory outside the city maps for tourists, prefab blocks, closed-down factories, public buildings – schools, libraries, a hospital, Georgian orthodox and Jewish cemeteries, some offices, administration, some new but mostly empty blocks. Informal zoning: “Isani” – according to some, the cheapest market in Tbilisi, the Azerbaijanian market, in a closed-down mill and around it, near the metro station Isani. Outside the metro system: garages – small informal garages offering all kinds of car services for a small budget, along the railway line; djarti area – scrap trade on unused land previously occupied by demolished factories or other Soviet constructions. The area is located on the periphery of the residential area. Hidden features: internally displaced people (IDPs) currently live in some of the old factories.

*Urban Edge*

Residential area: some new production sites, new churches, a lot of green and empty space.

For anthropological ends, however, the symbolic texture of the city is equally important. For this reason, we also distinguished between the symbolic sub-zones made by inhabitants.

In Baku, the zones that can be distinguished according to the model are more or less congruent with local designations for different parts of the city. So the suburban zone along the railway line, which is characterized by small buildings and a few Soviet apartment blocks, is called “near the bread factory”, a reference to the last factory in this zone that used to be an industrial area until the early 1990s. But names can also draw on new and conspicuous markers that are untypical for a zone: The residential zone shaped by late-Stalinist apartment blocks with their typical backyards is known as “around landmark” – one of the first skyscrapers built during the Second Oil Boom. As a toponym, it refers to this residential zone, not to the neighboring city center or suburban area.

This kind of collective informal zoning and naming reflects different practices in the perception of urban space. First, it mirrors everyday uses of the city, and second, a symbolic perception that differentiates between a national or a socialist style and new architectures. Up to 2012, the different cities displayed characteristic features. That the city administration installed new street “furniture” exclusively in the urban core was part of urban redevelopment. As in Central Asian cities, public space is still an object of centralized/state design strategies limited to a few important streets and squares.<sup>15</sup>

Density is considered to be an attribute of urbanization, and New Urbanists see it as a marker that helps to distinguish zones. For them, the urban core zone displays the highest building density and the smallest amount of green and open spaces between buildings. This might be true for the medium-sized, largely unindustrialized cities they worked in, but in many European and North American cities, the urban core zone is characterized by open space, wide avenues and extensive parks surrounded by areas of high building density. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, wide central avenues and squares were used for showing military strength, national pride or everyday proximity between the people and those in power, a tradition which was carried on in the socialist countries through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, parks have also been used in industrial cities as a part of a strategy to create health and recreational space for the “working mass”. In the capitalist countries of North America and Western Europe, the construction of parks also led to an increase in the value of building ground around it, while land in general was not assessed in monetary terms in the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup>

Defining “urbaness” in such a way that a higher density of buildings means a higher degree of urbanization ignores the fact that the luxury of “wasting” valuable land in the middle of a city by

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15 See Victor Buchli “Archeology of Socialism” pp. 40–69. This phenomenon is contrary to developments in cities like New York, where the redevelopment of public space is driven by public/private partnerships or even by private investors (Sharon Zukin, *Culture of Cities* (Cambridge/Mass.: Blackwell 2008).

16 Richard E. Fogelson: *Planning the Capitalist City*. (Princeton: University Press, 1986). pp. 89–102.



creating extensive greens, wide avenues or squares is perceived as an important part of creating and representing an urban core in a big city. Therefore the highest density is usually found in the zone surrounding the urban core zone.

In Baku, the Fountain Square – a paved square with green zones, playgrounds and fountains – is the most important landmark in the urban core. It was originally constructed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial city as a parade-ground for the Russian army, but became a space for leisure and a see-and-be-seen promenade during Soviet times. The square was renovated in 2009/2010. Fountain Square and the neighboring streets are considered to be the heart of the city with many expensive shops and Western-style coffee shops, which are almost empty compared with the open space that is usually overcrowded with people of all ages in the late afternoons and evenings. Even though Fountain Square is heavily observed by cameras, police and security guards, the space is usually perceived as “free” especially by young people, who use it to gather with friends outside the social control exercised within their own neighborhoods. In 2012 there were still some political demonstrations in Fountain Square whereas the demonstrations that took place a year later mostly concentrated on the outskirts of Baku.

## Features of the Symbolic Urban Texture – Special Districts and Blind Spots

According to the New Urban Planners, special districts are parts of the city that do not fit in the zoning model. They can appear in any zone and are loosely or not connected to their surrounding zone. In the planning transect, college campuses, industrial districts, and traffic hubs such as airports and railway stations form typical examples of these special districts. Meanwhile, sites such as the college campus or industrial districts might be typical American examples of special districts; in the context of post-Soviet cities, these sites must be categorized differently. In post-Soviet cities, industrial regions are traditionally incorporated into residential areas in peripheral residential and suburban zones. The whole list of examples established by the NUP for the category of special districts seems too wide for anthropological research where the focus is on physical and symbolic appropriations (that is, the ways in which these sites form part of the routes of everyday life and how they are appropriated by memories or narrations of the city). On the basis of these considerations, it is difficult to identify special districts in Baku or Tbilisi as defined by the NUP. But if we take the idea into account more metaphorically and start to look for fault lines that distinguish the condition, atmosphere, and materials used in certain sites in one zone, we will recognize certain urban structural patterns that provide deeper insights into the appropriations of space.

Following this logic, we can identify “special areas” or “specialized areas” in Tbilisi that can be classified by their function, their use of place, special form. The aforementioned open-air markets (bazaars), ferrous scrap trade and workshops (for cars) can be seen as part of this category. Typically they are located in disused socialist

constructions, for example factories, that are situated in the typically socialist residential areas. While based in former state-owned economic institutions, they are now organized and planned by individual initiative. On a material level, these private small-scale economic activities are not fully stabilized, the constructions are just reused and reconstructions are improvised. The activities meet the everyday needs of the population and seem to be aimed at small budgets, which is reflected in the prices and origins of the services and products offered – self-made, Georgian, Turkish, Azerbaijani, or unknown. These points accentuate a break between these sites and their surroundings, but on other levels the connections become evident. First, the low-budget economic initiative connects them with the inhabitants of their neighborhood and with people from the wider city area. Second, as they meet popular needs, they are part of everyday routes through the city; and third, these sites form informal urban markers in conversation and within the system of urban orientation. On a functional level, they seem to form “specialized areas” in the city; on the material and symbolical levels, they are manifestations of people’s economic needs.

The Tbilisian examples demonstrate the existence of “specialized areas” that are used by a specific part of the population on a regular or daily basis, and therefore these areas are connected with other parts of the city by complex patterns of mobility. We discovered another variety of special districts in Tbilisi and Baku with features that are almost the opposite of those identified above: sacred places, and national memorials. They often seem to be noticed only on special occasions when they attract people from a much wider geographical area than the actual zone.

The national memorial in Baku, the Martyr’s Alley, was built as a graveyard for the Bakuvians killed by the Soviet army during the violent repression of the Azerbaijani uprising in January 1990. Gradually it was converted into a national memorial that now also includes a WWII memorial and a graveyard for soldiers killed during the Karabakh War 1992–1994. Located on a hill overlooking the bay, the structure with the eternal flame is widely visible from the city center, but it is not within typical mobility patterns. As a result, people do not just pass by. The Martyr’s Alley moves into the center of national attention only once a year on 20 January, Memorial Day. On this day people from all over the country come here to commemorate those killed by the Soviet army, an event that is widely covered by the media. There is no special memorial day for the soldiers who died during the Karabakh War and who are also buried there. For much of the rest of the year, the memorial is widely neglected. Even if some people still come to visit the graves of their relatives, most visitors come to enjoy the seaside view and the fresh air.

For anthropological purposes, it seems reasonable to distinguish between different kinds of spaces that produce a rupture in the structure of the surroundings and are therefore not recognized as part of this zone by locals. Meanwhile, special districts form part of everyday life to varying degrees; other places, in contrast, can be characterized as “forgotten places” or “blind spots”.<sup>17</sup> They

<sup>17</sup> For example Kusenbach and Krasny. Blind spots can also be compared to the idea of spatial asyndetons how they are described by de Certeau (following J.-F. Augoyard). Asyndeton is an aspect of individual movement and

are usually not mentioned in conversations and interviews, they do not function as landmarks, they are not connected by everyday activities, and they are (no longer) part of personal memories. Typical examples of “blind spots” that exist in every zone are abandoned buildings, construction sites, and sometimes unused parks or playgrounds that are not even considered to be dangerous, otherwise they would be mentioned. In Baku and Tbilisi, we noticed the existence of a very particular kind of “blind spots” in urban core zones, which are connected to certain historical periods, problems and events that are suppressed in the collective memory.

In the center of Baku, the old Armenian Cathedral is a striking example of a “blind spot” in the collective memory of Bakuvis about their town. The Cathedral was closed after the pogroms against the Armenian population in Baku in 1990. While the building itself is hard to miss, the church is not usually mentioned in interviews or when people give directions. Typical orientation points are “Let’s meet at the ice-cream vendor with the red umbrella” or “In front of the new fancy coffee shop” – both answers gently exclude the huge Armenian church on the corner. For some Azerbaijanis, the reason might be to avoid any memory of the former Armenian Cathedral in Baku’s center. But since neither Armenian nor Russian Bakuvis use the building as a reference point, the former center of Armenian religious and cultural life in Baku is no longer a site of everyday identity construction – in contrary to the ice-cream vendor or the coffee shop.

In Tbilisi, the Azerbaijani cemetery, which is situated on the periphery of the old city, offers a similar example. Today the cemetery is in the backmost part of the botanical garden, and there are no signs leading towards it. Large areas of it are used for floriculture and are not recognizable as a site of graves anymore. Only old Tbilisians who spent their childhood in the old part of the city know of its existence and reuse.

## Markers of Urban Change – “Canary Birds” and “Lighthouses”

The notion of change is central for investigating urban environments. Two directions – up- and downgrading – are characteristic dynamics of urban change under both neoliberal and post-Soviet conditions. For a transect, it is therefore advisable to introduce elements that can make these processes visible on the material and the symbolical levels. The term “lighthouse project” seems suitable to describe projects that are models for further development, in addition to their functional purpose. In the urban context, “lighthouses” are building projects that can be seen as casting a light on previously neglected neighborhoods. They are placed in the neighborhood by outside actors (state, economic or religious organizations) in order to initiate the desired changes.

In Baku, the covering of Soviet facades with (fake or real) sandstone panels (financed by the state) makes them look more like First Oil Boom mansions. This attempt to create a clearly defined aesthetic change with little effort can be interpreted as a

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perception of space that includes the skipping of whole areas, sites from the individual city map. Michel de Certeau “Kunst des Handelns” (Berlin: Merve 1988) p. 195.

“lighthouse”-project, aimed at enhancing the status of the neighborhood and removing the aesthetics of the socialist past.

In Tbilisi, the government painted selected façades of peripheral Soviet apartment block buildings in screaming colors and thus created “lighthouses” symbolizing governmental care in the urban and social periphery.

In contrast to the “lighthouses”, “canary birds” are signs and agents of social and economic change driven by the changing needs of residents.<sup>18</sup> They symbolize changes in the urban structure that refer to changes on the meso- and macro-level of the city and society.<sup>19</sup> The appearance and disappearance of shops and facilities in certain neighborhoods reflects the dynamics of social downgrading or upgrading in the city, including a shift in social and cultural values, and a change in collective desires. The emergence of betting agencies, pawn houses and “99 cents” shops, for example, can be seen as the “canary birds” of economic decline of a neighborhood. In contrast, fancy coffee shops, tearooms, galleries and shops offering organic goods are the signs of continuing gentrification.

In Baku, shops providing cheap internet access vanished from the city center over the last few years. This development corresponds with an increase in Western-style coffee bars offering wireless internet, Western-style snacks, and a more comfortable atmosphere. An increasing number of young people who can afford laptops and expensive coffee creations flock to these bars.

The construction of the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity (Sameba) in the 90ies was a lighthouse project announcing the new strength and official acceptance of the Orthodox Church. Since then, little churches in medieval style have appeared also in socialist residential areas. Most of these religious building projects have been initiated and financed by the neighborhood. So here the chapels appear to be canary birds of the wider recognition of the church as an important institution in everyday life, and the public recognition of individual initiative as a form of participation in urban change.

The New Urbanists designate some signs of ongoing but just occasionally visible change as “out of zone” or “kitsch”. “Out of place” elements are characterized by a new or a different aesthetic; they are indicators of new desires that often articulate new cultural trends or social differentiations in the area of research. In contrast to lighthouse projects but in comparison to canary birds, “out of place” elements are characterized exclusively by individual activity and may serve as indicators of a do-it-yourself-urbanism.

In Baku, restaurants in “typical Azerbaijani style” often display elements resembling rural compounds with wooden fences, artificial trees and stuffed animals or life-size puppets in more or less authentic traditional costumes at the front. Even if individual elements have a connection to Azerbaijan, the overall impression is one of a

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18 The term is inspired by the canary birds that miners took with them into the mine because the behavior of these highly sensitive birds signaled whether the concentration of invisible gas became dangerous.

19 Tijs van den Boomen, *Die unsichtbare Mauer*, in: *Spiegel Online*, 2011–08–21, [http://www.tijsvandenboomen.nl/?page\\_id=2&mode=browse&artikel\\_id=1398](http://www.tijsvandenboomen.nl/?page_id=2&mode=browse&artikel_id=1398) (last access 28/11/2013)

Russian or Western fairy tale. But that does not mean that their clients are mainly foreigners – on the contrary, there are many Azerbaijanis who enjoy an atmosphere connected with a diffuse longing for a “golden age” when everything was better than today.

Fenced-in areas in the house yards used as garages or gardens to raise greens and vegetables are still characteristic of the socialist quarters of Tbilisi. These gardens and garages date back to the Shevardnadze era when food supply was a serious problem for many people and criminal activity was high. Back then, this kind of private gardening was essential for many whereas today these gardens are an illicit relict or already private property.

## Conclusion

This paper adopted the transect method from urban planning and used it for anthropological research. The application draws on a variety of aspects the New Urbanists identified for urban development. These aspects cover functional features on the level of materiality, furnishing, atmosphere and facility supply that urban neighborhoods should offer.

The anthropological transect uses this catalogue of aspects for qualitative analysis to describe specific characteristics of cities. Going beyond the aims of the New Urbanists, the anthropological use of the transect method introduces the symbolic level of the urban materials into the research. It does so by focusing on distinct uses that offer insights into the emic system of values and meanings. To grasp the constant economical, political and cultural changes that characterize the field of the everyday and the urban landscape in Baku and Tbilisi, we introduced additional elements – the markers of the changes – into the transect. In this manner, different categories of urban signifiers emerge that seem to visualize changes and their specific dynamics.

In anthropology the transect is a systematic form of *Wahrnehmungsspaziergang* (urban walk) along a predefined route. It puts the open and actor-centered approaches of go-alongs and city telling into the framework of urban materiality and the use of urban space. This systematic and strictly space-bound collection of data (1) reflects the quantity of the appearance, (2) shows patterns of the spatial distribution and (3) includes the setting of these objects on the material and symbolical levels. The data therefore allow multiple comparisons between different areas within a city and between cities.

The urban transect is an instrument for the start of fieldwork; a first exploration of the diverse urban conditions in a cross-section from the center to the outskirts. The predetermination of the transect route alongside detours, as it is common in other academic fields, also seems reasonable to use in and adapt to anthropology. This mode highlights randomness as the main approach for the first entry into the field and challenges to a certain degree the prevalence of personal presuppositions, preferences, and points of interests, and accommodates the less spectacular sites of everyday life.

## APPENDIX – Technical Advice for Transects

### 1) Itinerary

The transect must include all urban zones, from the urban core to peripheral areas. Only the full picture enables us to identify different functional, architectural and social urban zones, their typical and non-typical markers, and to recognize how one zone merges into another. The demand that a transect should follow a straight line, articulated in other academic fields, should be taken more literally, that is, a transect should not make intentional detours to include special features of the city and should lead from the core zone to the outskirts more or less directly. The aim is not to follow symbolical patterns or individual interests but to offer a real cross-cut through the city.

The claim to use back roads might sometimes turn out to be difficult in practice, partly because of the problem to cover the city center by means of back roads, partly because “back roads” and “main roads” can be difficult to define in areas with mixed use. Even if “everyday life” can be mapped both in terms of back roads and main roads, the researcher must be aware that the use of a main road or a back road will generate very different findings.

### 2) Guiding Questions

The transect can be carried out in two different ways: The first option is to start a transect in order to track down and document specific pre-defined political, economic and social changes that affect the city. This approach helps to trace changes throughout the city, showing the ways in which different zones were affected by them and how inhabitants of different zones deal with them. The downside of this approach might be to stick to pre-defined assumptions and therefore to overlook alternative options.

The other option calls for a “naïve” researcher; it suggests concentrating on the plain materiality and its appropriation without interpreting the traces of political, economic or social changes in the city right away.

### 3) Modes of Coverage

The transect can be implemented in different modes: on foot, by public transport or by private car. Walking is usually the first choice because it is the most self-determined way to explore a city and offers the best opportunity to take pictures and notes. A transect by public transport or by car is particularly useful if you want to cover a very long distance or experience the everyday life of commuters in a city. In general it is advisable to repeat a transect in different ways: first, it captures the different rhythms and atmospheres of movement through a city and second, it shows the social images and positioning of different kinds of (public) transport.

#### 4) Walk and Talk

Sometimes it may be very productive to choose a local partner for the transect. Collaborative research allows the researcher to compare emerging questions and first impressions on the basis of different academic and life experiences. In particular, during interviews or informal talks with residents alongside the transect route, it might offer insights into different perceptions of the city and social situations that emerge because a researcher has intimate knowledge of, or is an outsider to the city.

#### 5) Recording

The objective of a transect is to record data (video, photo, notes, audio) in relation to its locality, that is, the transect is not only a systematic way of walking through the city, but also an extended form of mapping.

For all forms of recording, a wide range of proceedings is possible to compile systematic documentation. Let us take photography as an example: it is important to decide on the frequency or distance from which a photo must be taken. Furthermore, it is good to decide in advance which section of the urban landscape should be captured at each point. And finally, it is important to take the technical requirements into account, for example, the required photographic lens. These questions concerning the proceedings are highly dependent on the research questions and the urban environment.

Two examples: by taking long shots with a normal lens every 200 meters, you can cover large parts of the city and a wide range of features. This is what we did in Tbilisi. Meanwhile, if you focus on details and disruptions on the facades, as we did in Baku, very often you require a telephoto lens and an almost complete documentation of the objects. It is difficult to concentrate on other features of the zone at the same time.





*Illustration 2: Looking for Zone Specific Details Along the Nizami Street: Street Signs and Inscriptions*





*Illustration 3: Tbilisi 2009/2010 – Urban Areas and Special Districts*

## List of Figures

### Illustration 2: Looking for Zone Specific Details Along the Nizami Street: Street Signs and Inscriptions

Fig. 1–2: Suburban Zone “Near the Breadfactory“, Source: Melanie Krebs, 2010/2011

Fig. 3–4: Residential Area “Around Landmark” – Late-Stalinist Apartment Blocks, Source: Melanie Krebs, 2010/2011

Fig. 5–6: Urban Core Zone I – Reconstructing the Baku of the First Oil Boom (around 1900), Source: Melanie Krebs, 2010/2011

Fig. 7–8: Urban Core Zone II – The Baku of the Second Oil Boom Represents its Wealth, Source: Melanie Krebs, 2010/2011

### Illustration 3: Tbilisi 2009/2010 – Urban Areas and Special Districts

Fig. 1: Old Inner City Area, Source: Madlen Pilz

Fig. 2: Cathedral of Holy Trinity, Sameba, Source: Madlen Pilz

Fig. 3: Old Avlabari, Source: Madlen Pilz

Fig. 4: New Avlabari, Source: Madlen Pilz

Fig. 5: Tbilisi Residential Area, Source: Madlen Pilz

Fig. 6: Market Area in an Old Mill, Source: Madlen Pilz

Fig. 7: Scrap Trade Area, Source: Madlen Pilz

Fig. 8: Residential Area at the Urban Edge, Source: Madlen Pilz